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ABSTRACT

Study-abroad programs are among the many academic programs being evaluated in the assessment of colleges and universities. One evaluative tool is the survey of students who participate in these programs. This paper discusses the use of such surveys by St. Mary's College (Indiana) during the past decade to gather information regarding program strengths and weaknesses and assess the impact of the study abroad program on participants. Statistical data are presented showing what St. Mary's College has learned about its study-abroad program and student needs over the years. These data were collected not only from student surveys of those completing their study-abroad programs, but also routinely from incoming freshmen as well as from outcome measures administered during and after the college experience. While the surveys provide compelling evidence of the immediate effects of these programs, long-term effects were found to be more difficult to determine. Part of the value in assessing these programs has been enhancing the school's ability to make program changes and modifying the program experience and student preparation to achieve greater positive impacts. (Contains nine references.) (GLR)

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ASSESSMENT OF STUDY-ABROAD PROGRAMS USING SURVEYS OF STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

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ABSTRACT

Study-abroad programs are among the many academic programs being evaluated in the assessment of colleges and universities. One evaluative tool is the survey of students who participate in these programs. This paper discusses the use of these surveys during the past decade to gather information regarding program strengths and weaknesses and assess the impact of the program on the students who participated. Institutional researchers at colleges and universities where a significant number of students participate in study abroad and/or whose campuses sponsor study-abroad programs will find this paper useful.

ASSESSMENT OF STUDY-ABROAD PROGRAMS USING SURVEYS OF STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

Introduction

It is estimated that one in ten undergraduates in American colleges and universities study abroad during their college experience (Cohen, 1987, p. 41). There are 1,300 programs sponsored by accredited colleges and universities (Howard, 1990, p. v), running the gamut from branch/extension campuses operated by North American colleges and universities to co-exchange programs with existing institutions in the host countries. Since their experiences often are cited by those who studied abroad as being among the most formative in their college experience, it seems appropriate in this era of program and outcomes assessment to include the evaluation of these programs in the assessment program of colleges and universities. Further, if participation in these programs has an effect on the interests and values of the students who spend a term or two abroad, these should be identified and noted as program outcomes.

The literature of program review and assessment (eg., Ewell, 1988; Kinnick, 1985; Wilson, 1987) emphasizes the importance of evaluation of institutional effectiveness at the program level. While program review usually is considered to be an assessment of a curricular program or department, it can also be applied to such services as study-abroad programs.

Stutzman (1985) has provided a guide to on-site evaluation of undergraduate

programs, noting that these programs typically receive little attention from evaluators. Among the data collected in these site visits are evaluations from student participants, both present and past.

The use of student surveys for gathering assessment outcomes information is a widely-used method for some of the information needed in conducting program reviews (Ewell, 1987, p. 20). Indeed, the practice of collecting student evaluation data and widely disseminating the results is seen as strengthening the quality of education (National Institute of Education, 1984).

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) note limited research investigating effects of study abroad as inconsistent and "not distinguished for the rigor of its research designs and methods" (p. 306). While there is evidence of limited impact, they suggest introduction of pre-study-abroad controls might yield very different results.

A summary of this previous research in Kauffmann, Martin, and Weaver (1992) also provides case studies to "attach the research results to reality and make them more understandable." (p. 2) These authors also propose a theoretical framework for future research on the effects of study abroad on students.

This paper provides a rationale for conducting the assessment of study-abroad programs, gives a report of how one college evaluates the experience of the abroad study of its students (both on the overseas branch campus and in co-exchange programs), evaluates the immediate effect of study abroad, and makes recommendation for future research in this area. In so doing, it is hoped that other institutional researchers will benefit from the presenter's experience.

Methodology

The study abroad evaluation process described is part of the assessment of the study-abroad programs officially sponsored by Saint Mary's College, a Catholic women's college. Saint Mary's is a competitive, highly ranked comprehensive college in the liberal arts tradition, sponsoring study abroad programs in Rome (overseas branch campus), India (a "Semester Around the World" study tour of the Far East with several weeks at Stella Maris College), Ireland (students enroll at Saint Patrick's College), as well as a summer program in London.

Periodic surveys of student participants collect evaluative data regarding each of these programs (Table 1 identifies the evaluations conducted during the past ten years). The evaluation cycle also includes a survey of students whose study abroad was in programs not sponsored by the College.

These surveys are administered to participating students at the end of their study abroad, either just before they leave or shortly after they arrive home. Items included on the surveys evaluate the academic program, program advising and orientation, personal adjustments, cultural contacts, living arrangements, and growth towards personal and institutional goals (sample surveys can be obtained from the author). Space is provided on the survey instrument for respondents' comments to amplify and/or explain the quantitative responses or to provide anecdotal evidence to describe their feelings and experiences.

Response rates to these surveys generally run about 60 to 80 percent, and are generally considered representative of the cohort; indeed, if there is any

Table 1

History of study abroad evaluations at Saint Mary's College

	Ireland			India			Rome		
	Survey Respon-dents	Program Parti-cipants	Resp Rate	Survey Respon-dents	Program Parti-cipants	Resp Rate	Survey Respon-dents	Program Parti-cipants	Resp Rate
1982-83	18	25	72%						
1984-85							47	50	94%
1985-86	18	28	64%						
1987-88							58	60	97%
1988-89	14	30	47%						
1989-90	20	26	77%	16	21	76%	62	78	79%
1990-91							35	59	59%
1991-92	14	21	67%	16	20	80%	35	40	88%

response bias, it is the students who have the strongest reactions to their experience who are more likely to respond.

In addition to the student surveys administered to those completing their study abroad-program, the College routinely collects information from incoming freshmen and outcome measures during and after the college experience. Thus, it should be possible to compare pre- and post-experience scores on the same items between students whose undergraduate experience included study abroad and the others in their cohort who did not study abroad.

Results

The results of the student evaluations show the study abroad experience has been a positive one for participants. Particularly, it has opened their eyes to a world to which most were not familiar prior to their travel and study abroad.

While the survey for each program has unique items relevant for the particular program, there are common questions on all three surveys that provide the basis for comparison between the programs. Among these items are a series of questions based on the College's goals for students in these programs. Respondents are asked to identify the degree of growth (using a four-point scale from "None" to "Great") they experienced towards each of these goals (see Table 2).

The items on which they reported the greatest amount of growth were "Appreciation and understanding of different cultures" (an average of 88.1% of the respondents reported experiencing a "great" amount of growth), "Growth in independence and maturity" (84.9%), "Greater self-awareness" (80.9%), "Greater tolerance for different people and ideas" (75.8%), and "Growth in interpersonal skills, ability to interact with others, handle stress, etc." (69.3%).

An item included only on the India and Ireland evaluations was an area of "great growth" by 92 percent of the respondents—"Increased ability to adapt to the unfamiliar", and two items included only on the Ireland survey were areas of "great growth" by more than 90 percent of the respondents—"Opportunity to travel and see new places" (97.5%) and "Interact with the Irish people" (91.5%).

Table 2

Growth towards College's goals for program participation

	India		Ireland			Rome		
Percent reporting "Great Growth"	89	91	88-89	89-90	91-92	89-90	90-91	91-92
Appreciation/understanding different cultures	87%	100%	86%	95%	86%	87%	87%	77%
Greater tolerance different people/ideas	62	100	83	67	92	66	67	69
Better perspective American culture/history	50	87	46	50	46	48	46	26
Better understanding US/others role in world	71	93	67	61	43	43	57	33
Better understanding other political systems	67	71	50	13	42	34	29	23
Greater self-awareness	93	80	86	84	85	77	73	69
Growth in independence and maturity	100	100	92	84	93	68	73	69
Growth in interpersonal skills	82	80	75	68	79	58	55	57
Intellectual stimulation/development	79	83	39	35	40	54	44	37
Aesthetic appreciation and enjoyment	69	92	75	75	0	79	69	66
Increased ability to use foreign language	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	44	37	34
Appreciation of other cultures/religions	99	100	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Deeper appreciation own religious heritage	38	80	40	36	13	39	27	20
Increased ability adapting unfamiliar	100	100	85	75	100	NA	NA	NA
Experience different teaching/education	NA	NA	NA	33	50	NA	NA	NA
Interact with indigenous (Irish) people	NA	NA	NA	90	93	NA	NA	NA
Opportunity to travel and see new places	NA	NA	NA	95	100	NA	NA	NA
Learn more re family heritage/visit relatives	NA	NA	NA	53	40	NA	NA	NA

(Scale: 1 = "None" 2 = "Little" 3 = "Moderate" 4 = "Great")

Continued

Table 2 - Continued

As a contribution to your total college education experience how would you rate your experience on the Program?	
India	
Autumn 1989	4.00
Autumn 1991	4.00
Ireland (question not used after 1988-89)	
1982-83	3.89
1985-86	3.94
1988-89	3.93

(Scale: 1 = "Not valuable" 2 = "Of some value" 3 = "Valuable" 4 = "Very valuable")

The surveys of the India and (some of the) Ireland programs also included an overall summative question, "As a contribution to your total college education experience, how would you rate your experience on the Program?" (see Table 2). On the four-point scale, the respondents were nearly unanimous in describing their experience as being "Very valuable".

Perhaps the most telling results from the survey have been the added comments of participants. Following are excerpts from some of these comments:

The Semester Around the World Program primarily changed my view of myself. I learned what I was made of and what I could do. I think beyond exploring the Far East, I really explored myself and my independence. (India 1989)

All of these areas of growth and maturity were possible through the program

experience. It was not so much the "big" events that were influential, but the day-in/day-out routines and relationships that gave the opportunity to grow and appreciate. (Ireland 1991-1992)

I've definitely grown spiritually, emotionally, and have a greater love for the arts. (Rome 1989-1990)

I've never learned more about myself and my goals as an adult than all I have learned this year. (Rome 1990-1991)

Living in Rome has had a profound effect on my life—it has given me a deeper appreciation for other people and for life in general. (Rome 1990-1991)

I don't believe there is any experience that has touched my life in so many ways!! My Semester Around the World experience has changed my attitudes, ideas, outlooks, goals, and life!! Each and every day I feel the positive impact of this wonderful experience. (India 1989)

The entire experience helped me to grow, expand my horizons, deal with people better, realize my independence and gain an overall confidence in myself and my abilities to adapt, learn and grow in a new environment. (India 1989)

I grew more (socially, culturally, independently) during my year of study in Ireland than I ever have before. (Ireland 1988-1989)

I strongly believe that study abroad is a vital part of a liberal arts education, especially in what one learns outside of the classroom. (Ireland 1988-1989)

The opportunity to live in and study in another culture is one of the most rewarding experiences a person could ever have. (Ireland 1989-1990)

This program opened my mind to the rest of the world. It gave me a better understanding of the people in the world. It also taught be aspects about life and death, poverty and wealth, and what is accepted and not accepted throughout the

world. This program helped me to become a well-rounded person. (India 1991)

The program taught me more than any other semester I've encountered. . . [T]here are still tons of things I have yet to learn and understand. (India 1991)

Saint Mary's conducts a survey of seniors every other year along with a parallel sophomore survey. The senior survey includes a items asking respondents to evaluate the degree to which participation in a study abroad program was of value to their overall intellectual and personal growth (see Table 3). Although the scale was changed in 1991 to a truer Likert-type scale, the respondents are nearly unanimous in their perception of the value of their study abroad program.

The last two senior surveys also included an open-ended question asking respondents to describe their most successful experience while at Saint Mary's. While the 1993 survey is still being processed at the writing of this paper, the study abroad experience was cited by more of the 1991 respondents than any other experience except for their overall academic achievement (other topics mentioned include personal development and independence, extra-curricular activities and/or athletics, student-faculty interaction, and relationships with other students). Excerpts from some of these comments follow:

I learned more about myself, about life, about people in general than I ever could have at home. (Ireland participant)

Through [the Rome Program] I was able to increase my knowledge and awareness about myself and the person I would like to become.

Beyond a shadow of a doubt, [the Rome Program] was the most important four months of my life. . .—opportunities and experiences have shaped me forever.

Table 3

Value of program to overall intellectual and personal growth - Senior Survey

Year	Score
1985	3.94
1987	3.99
1989	3.94
(Scale: 1 = "Negative factor" 2 = "None" 3 = "Some" 4 = "Great")	
1991	4.72
1993	4.75
(Scale: 1 = "Very little" . . . 5 = "Very much")	

Included on the senior survey are a number of items regarding respondents' growth while in college. Table 4 lists a selection of these items, picked for their potential relationship with the expected outcomes of study abroad. Also shown are the average scores on these items for the past two survey administrations, grouped by whether the respondent participated in a study abroad program or not. Independent sample t-tests or chi-square analyses were used to determine whether or not there were significant differences in these scores. Some items were also included on this list because differences were found between those who were study abroad participants and the other respondents.

There was hardly any consistency across the two surveys on the items

Table 4

Results of senior survey items by participation status

Program participation?	1991 No	1991 Yes	1993 No	1993 Yes
Self-rating, growth over four years:				
Intellectual self-confidence	4.05	4.13	4.33	4.49
(Scale: 1 = "Much weaker" . . . 5 = "Much stronger")				
Importance personally:				
Promote racial understanding	2.72	2.87	2.86	3.14
Participate in a community service program	2.64	2.80	2.81	3.11**
Influence social values	2.57	2.79*	2.95	3.00
(Scale: 1 = "Not important" 2 = "Somewhat important" 3 = "Very important" 4 = "Essential")				
Extent to which experience growth over four years:				
Ability to think clearly and critically	4.09	4.17	4.15	4.40**
Understanding and tolerance for other people and ideas	4.08	4.11	4.02	4.34**
Independence, ability to make own decisions	4.35	4.24	4.29	4.42
Formulating the values and goals of my life	3.92	4.14*	4.19	4.38
Interest in and desire for life-long learning	4.03	4.25	4.04	4.37*
Social skills, ability to get along with others	3.88	3.81	4.09	4.24
Development of self-identity and self-confidence	4.22	4.22	4.24	4.51*
(Scale: 1 = "None" . . . 5 = "Very much")				
Achievement of Saint Mary's objectives:				
Keen self-knowledge	3.78	3.99*	4.01	4.21
Intellectual interests	4.17	4.22	4.19	4.42*
Cultural interests	3.74	4.06*	3.81	3.99
Competence in quantitative skills	3.88	3.55**	3.92	3.87
Competence in modern languages	2.79	3.35***	2.80	3.29**
(Scale: 1 = "Very little" . . . 5 = "Very much")				
Number	152	85	147	70

***$p < .001$ **$p < .01$ *$p < .05$

Continued

Table 4 - Continued

Program participation?	1991 No	1991 Yes	1993 No	1993 Yes
Extent to which Saint Mary's had effect:				
Knowledge of contribution of women to history/culture	3.11	3.22	3.36	3.83**
Awareness of women's rights/responsibilities today	3.74	3.74	3.92	4.30**
Aware of need for responsibility in global environment	3.66	3.75	3.68	3.81
Knowledge of problems/needs of the third world	2.95	3.18	3.05	3.39*
(Scale: 1 = "No change" . . . 5 = "Very much")				
Satisfaction with:				
Tone and quality of intellectual life in classroom	4.14	4.03	4.18	4.40*
(Scale: 1 = "Very dissatisfied" . . . 5 = "Very satisfied")				
Agreement with:				
More interested in ideas and intellectual matter	4.16	4.25	4.13	4.37*
Developed close relationships with other students	4.66	4.67	4.56	4.80*
Few faculty spend time out of class with students	2.00	1.86	1.89	1.60*
Few faculty are outstanding or superior	1.90	2.11	2.04	1.74*
Getting good grades is not important to me	1.83	2.00	1.87	2.19*
(Scale: 1 = "Strongly disagree" . . . 5 = "Strongly agree")				
Importance of				
Understanding and tolerance for other people and ideas	50%	49%	48%	59%
Independence, ability to make own decisions	63%	62%	52%	63%
Social skills, ability to get along with others	44%	40%	39%	46%
General tone/quality of intellectual life in the classroom	50%	38%	30%	46%*
Arrangements for expressing student opinion on policies	34%	28%	24%	40%*
(Scale: 1 = "Personally important" 0 = "Not important")				
Number	152	85	147	70

***$p < .001$ **$p < .01$ *$p < .05$

which were significantly different between those who participated in study abroad programs and those who did not. The only item which was significant ($p < .05$) both years was "Competence in modern languages".

Even more surprising were items identifying areas where the study abroad experience might have been expected to produce differences and there were no significant ($p < .05$) differences. These include growth in "Intellectual self-confidence", "Independence, ability to make own decisions", and "Social skills, ability to get along with others"; the extent to which the College had an effect on "Awareness of need for responsibility in global environment"; the importance of "Understanding and tolerance for other people and ideas" and "Independence, ability to make own decisions".

While in general the observed scores of respondents who had participated in study abroad and those who had not were more positive for those who had studied abroad, there were two items across both years where this was not the case. The degree to which respondents felt they had achieved the College's objective for "Competence in quantitative skills" was lower for those who studied abroad than it was for those who had not. The respondents who had studied abroad were less likely to disagree with the statement "Getting good grades is not important to me".

A comparison of the scores for the seniors in 1991 with that of the seniors in 1993 shows the 1991 respondents tended to be more negative in their rating of their growth and experiences at Saint Mary's than were the 1993 respondents.

Since the instruments used in the senior and sophomore surveys include

many items in common, it is possible for analyses of these surveys to include the study of change over time (sophomore to senior years) in respondents' opinions, attitudes, and perceptions of their growth as students. Indeed, one of the initial plans for this study was to make comparisons using many of the items found on Table 4 between those who had study abroad experience and those who did not. However, it was discovered this analysis is impossible to do at Saint Mary's, since most of the study abroad experience occurs during the sophomore year and those who are abroad are not included in the sophomore survey population.

However, it was possible on a few items on the senior survey to compare responses of seniors with their responses on the ACE/CIRP freshman survey they had taken as entering freshmen. These results are shown on Table 5. The statistical procedure used in this analysis was Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), using the equivalent freshman survey item as a covariate. Hence, the test of significance measures whether or not there is a difference between the scores of the seniors on each item, controlling for their scores on the equivalent freshman survey item.

The only items for which this procedure was possible were four items evaluating the seniors' perception of growth over their four years of college experience (as freshmen they had identified their ranking on these items compared with their peers) and twelve items on which they indicated (both as freshmen and as seniors) the degree to which each item had personal importance.

There were no items with significant differences ($p < .05$) for both years between the scores of those who had participated in study abroad and those who

Table 5

Differences between senior survey items by participation status, controlling for freshmen survey scores

Program participation?	1991 No	1991 Yes	1993 No	1993 Yes
Self-rating, growth over four years:				
Drive to achieve	3.94	4.11	4.15	4.00
Intellectual self-confidence	4.38	4.48	4.20	4.57*
Social self-confidence	4.16	4.09	4.07	4.24
Leadership ability	4.07	3.98	4.07	4.22
(Scale: 1 = "Much weaker" . . . 5 = "Much stronger")				
Importance personally:				
Help others in difficulty	3.31	3.13	3.39	3.53
Raise a family	3.24	3.40	3.44	3.33
Develop a meaningful philosophy of life	2.90	3.15	3.15	3.22
Obtain recognition fr colleagues for contributions to field	2.59	2.45	2.57	2.69
Promote racial understanding	2.72	2.81	2.78	3.17*
Participate in a community action program	2.66	2.80	2.81	3.06
Be authority in my field	2.52	2.55	2.56	2.61
Be involved in programs to clean up the environment	2.66	2.73	2.81	2.67
Be very well off financially	2.25	2.25	2.33	2.22
Have administrative responsibility for the work of others	2.18	2.13	2.29	2.31
Achieve in a performing or creative art#	1.69	2.00	1.59	1.97
Influence social values	2.48	2.84**	2.83	3.03
(Scale: 1 = "Not important" 2 = "Somewhat important" 3 = "Very important" 4 = "Essential")				
Number	89	55	61	37

#Senior survey item read "Achieve in a performing or creative art", covariates were freshman survey items "Becoming accomplished in one of the performing arts (acting, dancing, etc." and "Creating artistic work (painting, sculpture, decorating, etc.)".

**$p < .01$ *$p < .05$

had not, and only three items which were significant for one of the two classes. Seniors in 1991 who had participated in study abroad were more likely to value personally the importance of "Influencing social values" than were the seniors who had not studied abroad, while seniors in 1993 who had participated in study abroad were more likely to have experienced growth in their "Intellectual self-confidence" and to rate as more important their plans to "Promote racial understanding" than were the seniors who had not studied abroad.

While many of these items would not be expected to be related to the effects of study abroad, the item regarding the personal importance to "Promote racial understanding" could be considered to have such a relationship, with growth in this area being one of the desired outcomes of the study abroad programs. However, no significant differences were found on this item.

Discussion

The quantitative and verbal responses from each of the program evaluations provide compelling evidence of the immediate effect of the program on the participants, and this is to be expected. When the surveys are being completed, the respondents are either still abroad, or have just returned and are encountering the "return shock" experienced by those who have been away from campus and country for a period of time. The stimuli of their experience are fresh, and yes, indeed they do feel that being abroad has had a major impact on them.

But evidence of the long-term effect of this study abroad is more difficult to

find. Certainly it is expected that participants in a study abroad program where the language of instruction and daily living is not English would become more competent in that language, and it is possible that the effect of Saint Mary's program in Rome (the only one of the College's three programs where there is serious opportunity to use a different language) is strong enough to affect the overall results for all the study abroad participants. The finding that study abroad participants were less likely to achieve competency in quantitative skills probably reflects the greater likelihood of program participants to come from liberal arts and humanities and less likely to come from the sciences and/or mathematics, due not only to the interests of students in these disparate disciplines, but also possibly to the lack of flexibility in certain curricula.

Reasons as to why no differences were found where they might have been expected probably can be associated with the fact that these are items not specifically addressing the expected outcomes of study abroad, but rather are only tangential to whatever effect there is.

In terms of their value in assessing the programs, note that the chief academic officer at Saint Mary's identifies changes in the manner that the College administers its study-abroad programs, based at least in part on the results of these evaluations. The types of materials and topics used during the on-campus pre-experience orientations have been modified, and some of the pricing and programming related to the Rome program have also been adjusted based on student comments; the feedback received is valued.

Conclusions

After reviewing the results of several years of conducting surveys of study abroad participants, it is apparent that these studies fulfill an important part of evaluating the College's study-abroad programs. The information obtained is not only useful in determining each program's strengths and weaknesses, but it also identifies areas of personal growth in a number of areas both academic and social.

The difficulty in ascertaining whether or not study abroad programs had long-term effects on their participants can be attributed in part to methodological problems related to this specific study. Since the routine sophomore survey is an inappropriate vehicle for collection pre-experience information, other means of gathering such data (including data from program non-participants) need to be explored. At the present time, it appears at Saint Mary's that the best mechanism for gathering pre-experience information may be the freshman survey, administered during their initial orientation to the campus. Further study is planned in this area.

Nonetheless, the results presented here should contribute in a small way to the growing body of research on the effect of study abroad on student interest and values, and institutional researchers from campuses sponsoring and/or encouraging study abroad can benefit from the information presented and recommendations suggested in this paper.

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